

WALSH

The duties of religious
persons in time of war

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THE DUTIES OF RELIGIOUS PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR*

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The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.—LUKE ix. 56.

The power of love, as the basis of a state, has never been tried.—*Emerson's Essay on Politics.*

This is the first duty of religious persons in time of war,—to remain true to man's mission as a savior, not a destroyer. This redemptive principle in human nature has, in our time, been strongly assailed from two sides—from pseudo-science on the one hand, and a false philosophy on the other. The destructive agency of war has been expounded in every civilized country as a "biological necessity." The evolutionary principle has been proclaimed as a competitive instead of a co-operative principle. The scientific theories of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest through natural selection have been applied to things not contemplated by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, and it has been argued that man must continue to go on in the ancient prehuman destructive way. This is to ignore the very principles of science itself as well as of religion, for the significance of the ascent of man is precisely that he is able to substitute social and international co-operation for the anti-human internecine system of combat. With man has arrived the age of reason, and of the sovereignty of will over instinct, and love over egoism. While destruction was the characteristic of the ancient animal type, salvation is the characteristic of the new human type. Those

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who conform to type shall survive, while those who refuse to conform shall perish. Those who persist in living according to the old egoistic, selfish, destructive instincts of the lower orders of creation shall perish; while such as accept and live according to the new vision of love and neighborliness and mutual aid shall survive. That is the truth that is being written in blood on the plains of Europe to-day. It is excellent biology. It is equally pure religion. To that religion all who believe in God and in the divinity of man must cling in the teeth of all contradiction.

The religion of salvation is, I said, assailed also in the name of philosophy—and that in more civilized countries than one. The doctrine that might is right, that the earth with its treasures of life, land, gold, love, women, is nothing but booty for the bold, has been preached by the philosophers of more than one nation. They have returned to the worship of power in the person of the superman, the egoist, in other words, the tyrant, represented by such names as Nero, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, while lesser persons are to be admired in proportion as they embody the fruits of ambition, success, physical health and beauty, to the enslaving and slaying of such as have not the ability or the will to dispute their passage. To be a "full-blooded Dionysus" is the goal of the perfected ego. Peasants and children may continue (proceeds this philosophy) to admire suffering saviors like Sakya Muni, who surrendered a beautiful wife, a palace, and a kingdom, in order to deliver mankind from evil; or Jesus, who permitted himself to be nailed to the cross for the sake of his people; or Socrates, who drank the hemlock that Athens might know the truth; but such specimens of weakness are scorned by the devotees of the Overman, whom they imagine to have the right merely because he has the might, who is without fear or pity or remorse, and who is free to impose his will equally by club or sword or gallows. The revolt against the gospel of salvation—against the mission of man to be a savior—has been in full blood in Europe and America, while a gospel literally

of damnation has been substituted which on the battle-plains of Europe is being proved a desolating delusion. The aim of religion is to foster love, unselfishness and co-operation, neighborliness and mutual aid; while to keep this aim ever before our own minds, and to keep it ever before the people, is the first great duty of religious persons in war time.

The second duty flows necessarily from the first—the duty of exalting moral forces over physical violence. In times like these tremendous pressure is brought to bear upon our faith in moral forces, perhaps by our friends even more than by those who are opposed to us. The temptation to interpret religious duty in terms of destruction rather than salvation is enormously strong. True religion will resist and overcome that temptation. True religion will ever put thought above strife. Religion will resist the effort of the world to drag it down to its lower ethical plane, and will rather strive to lift the world up to its own divine height. The world never ceases its effort to secure religion for its ally, to bring religion over to its side, to get religion to condone its actions and methods; but religion must strive with all its divine energy to impress its ideals upon the world. While the world strives to get religion to fight, religion must more successfully strive to get the world to love. The world and its way may be illustrated by the words of a native chief who had heard Dr. Moffatt preach on the resurrection of the dead: "Father," said he, "I love you much; your visit has made my heart white as milk; the words of your mouth are sweet like honey. But I do not wish to hear about the dead rising again. The dead cannot rise! The dead shall not rise! I have slain thousands, and—shall they rise?" The chief's voice is the voice of mankind resisting the Spirit: "Religion" (protest the nations) "cannot condemn war. Religion shall not condemn war! We have slain our millions—and shall war be irreligious?" As against all such protestations, religion must remain firm to its divine call. Religion must exalt character over conquest, piety above policy,

martyrdom over killing. The way of war is to take away the sinners, the way of religion is to take away the sin, of the world. Amid the extremest necessities of war-time the religious person must never permit himself to be so transformed into the citizen or the warrior as to be forgetful of that.

These considerations apply with peculiar force to the pulpit as the voice of religion. It is peculiarly incumbent on the preacher to resist the pressure of such times, and to remain faithful to the divine principles of religion. The powers which make for destruction are sufficiently strong without his endorsement and alliance. As God's spokesman, it is his place to keep alive the great facts and truths of salvation both human and divine, both on this sphere and in spheres beyond. No truly religious citizen will seek to drag the preacher from his great vocation as the exponent and upholder of moral forces and spiritual principles. It is at a nation's peril that it degrades its pulpit into an advocate and apologist for war. The pulpit should provide an anchor amid the storm; it should be the still small voice of God above the earthquake and the thunder. It should never cease to protest against a double standard of morality, one for individuals and another for nations; never cease to insist upon the same law of God in personal and national affairs. It should, in season and out of season, magnify the value of reason over force, of love over violence; and plead for the arbitrament of reason in place of the arbitrament of the sword; plead for the substitution of justice and international law. Were this course followed by all the pulpits of the civilized world, there would never be another war.

The third duty of religious persons is to search their own hearts, and to assist the nation to a searching of conscience, with a view to discovering those moral causes which precede and give rise to every war whatever. Something more than political entanglements has turned Europe into an Aceldama. The ultimate cause is in the hearts of the belligerent nations. No doubt there are immediate

and direct causes connected with political exigencies and military necessities, but while conflict rages no mind is capable of setting them forth with just analysis. A state of war grievously warps the judgment, so that nothing less than Omniscience can determine the various degrees of error and affix proportional responsibilities upon those who bring about such international cataclysms as that in which we are to-day participants. But the spirit of religion is a spirit of justice. There are questions the spirit of justice cannot help asking under the influence of true religion. For many years statesmen have been warning Europe that the continuous and increasing armaments with which she was loading herself were bound to become intolerable, and were likely to bring about the very cataclysm they were designed to avert. In two great international conferences, held contemporaneously with the growth of the "armed peace," they provided the means of pacific adjustments through the machinery of the Hague Conventions. It is evident, therefore, that, if Europe had organized for peace as wholeheartedly as she has organized for war, she would to-day be saving instead of taking life, building homes instead of burning them. In one way or another all the contending nations participated in the mutual suspicion, selfishness, and jealousy which created the "armed peace" and brought about this unspeakable calamity, and therefore suffering has come upon them all, in greater or lesser degree. Therefore, when we have searched the national conscience, it is our duty to bravely confess to the Father of men our own share in these sins against humanity.

The fourth duty of religious persons is to encourage in themselves and in their fellow countrymen, as far as their influence extends, the spirit of charity so divinely chanted in our first lesson. Our religion should keep us calm and sane, and faithful to its immutable ideals. Our faith commits its professors to belief in "the Fatherhood of God to all mankind, irrespective of race, creed, or moral difference," and enjoins upon them "the paramount duty of brotherly love." These religious and ethical principles

preclude harsh judgments and thoughts of revenge. The doctrine of "reprisal" is alien to religion. To the true believer in God, no man, no nation, can be "the enemy," but each is a brother, a sister, even when they seem to be erring and provocative and shameful. Our divine religion recognizes no racial differences among the common children of him who "hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth." Therefore the cause of human unity and peace is bound up with the progress of true religion. We can be the friends of all other countries without being the enemy of our own, and therefore our efforts to succor those in distress, particularly non-combatants, should not exclude those with whom we are at war.

Further, our religious principles forbid us to participate in that mockery of prayer which obtains more or less among all the Christian nations at the present time. Theistic religion teaches that there is only one God, and that God is one. What, then, mean those vain petitions which all the Christian nations are offering against one another, at the same moment, to the same Deity? It is obvious that petitions offered by warring worshipers for results which are totally contradictory to one another cannot influence the judgments and decrees of Omnipotence. Many of the prayers which are being offered in the capitals and cathedrals of Europe at the present time are nothing but profane appeals to the old tribal deity who ought to have yielded place to the one God and Father of all. Therefore our prayers should be directed toward those ends which include the blessings of mercy, peace, prosperity, and justice to all the contending peoples, "irrespective of race, creed, or moral difference." We dare not impiously dictate to Deity in what manner or proportion he should distribute those blessings; but we should trust him to render to every man and nation according to the deeds done and the policy pursued, in full assurance that each shall receive the exact reward or punishment necessitated by Eternal Righteousness. The principles of religion require us to follow the path of

virtue "uninfluenced by fear of punishment or hope of reward." We do not believe that prayers can constrain or deflect the justice of God. We make no mean attempts to degrade the Eternal into a tribal deity, and to enlist the Universal Father as a partisan. We believe that the judge of all the earth will do—right.

The fifth duty of religious persons is to foster such a spirit and create such conditions as will render such an international sin impossible for all time coming. As no man can foresee the end of Europe's folly, so none can foretell in what shape society will emerge from the gulf; but we can adopt the memorable words of Abraham Lincoln, and strive "to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace." As believers in the one God—the sole Father of all the warring peoples alike—it is possible for us to render effective help toward building up the future commonwealth of Europe. We can help to organize the world for peace as it has hitherto been organized for war. With Emerson, we can deem it not impossible to make love the basis of the state, instead of violence. We can strive to substitute the co-operative sisterhood of the nations for the competitive militarism which has brought them to ruin. We can promote the federation of Europe on lines already roughly drawn by the Hague Conferences. As we mournfully survey the slaughtered heaps, the devastated fields and homes, the million crowds of desolated women and children, and as we further reflect upon the long impoverishment of the peoples, the far postponement of the reformers' hopes, we can fold our hands in solemn vow to the All-Father, that the expectation of his poor shall not perish forever.

It is our duty to hope and pray and strive for the removal of the conditions which make war possible. If we recall Chorley's great hymn to be sung, in war time, it is with a difference, for we look forward to the passing not of this war only, but of all war. Our prayer is grander than "Give to us peace in our time, O Lord!" Our vision is wider than our own race and our own generation. We pray that God may give peace to all men through all

time, and we believe the supreme opportunity has come to co-operate with God in the answering of our own prayers. Therefore "with strong crying and tears" we unitedly direct our hearts to

God, the All-terrible! King who ordainest
Thunder thy clarion and lightning thy sword;
Show forth thy pity on high where thou reignest,
Give to men peace through all time, O Lord!

God, the Omnipotent! Mighty Avenger!
Watching invisible, judging unheard;
Save us in mercy, oh, save us from danger,
Give to men peace through all time, O Lord!

God, the All-merciful! earth hath forsaken
Meekness and mercy; hath slighted thy word;
Bid not thy wrath in its terror awaken,
Give to men pardon and peace, O Lord!

God, the All-righteous One! man hath defied thee,
Yet to eternity standeth thy word,
Falsehood and wrong shall not tarry beside thee!
Give to men peace through all time, O Lord!

God, the All-pitiful! is it not crying—
Blood of the guiltless, like water outpoured?
Look on the anguish, the sorrow, the sighing,
Give to men peace through all time, O Lord!

So will thy people, with thankful devotion,
Praise him who saved them from peril and sword;
Shouting in chorus from ocean to ocean,
Peace to the nations, and praise to the Lord!

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